Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair

Publications

1. Philosophy East and West
2. The Vision Beckons
3. How Do We Psychoanalyse Our Societies and Religions?
4. Certainty and the Secular: Which Do We want?
5. നമുക്കാവശ്യം സർവ്വമത സംഗ്രാഹിയായ ഒരു വിശ്വനാഗരികത
6. Towards A New Enlightenment: This Time - Global, Spiritual and Comprehensive
7. The Dialogue of the Spirit & A Panchsheel for Religions
8. The Secular and The Spiritual: Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios and His Relevance Today
9. New Civilisation in the New Millennium
10. The Coming Great Civilisation Shift: On Preparing to Lay Foundations for a New Civilisation
11. Philosophy and the Quest for Meaning: Glimpses of Philosophical and Cultural Inquiry-Classical and Contemporary, Western and Eastern
12. Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery
    (A Spiritual Autobiography)

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair
School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

Publication Series No. 02

The Vision Beckons

Not one Religion for All Humanity,
But One Humanity for All Religions

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

The Vision Beckons

Not one Religion for All Humanity, But One Humanity for All Religions

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair
Mahatma Gandhi University
Publication Series No. 2

All rights reserved
Published by:
Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair,
School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies,
Mahatma Gandhi University,
Kottayam
Kerala, India
First Edition: Jan. 2017
Second Edition: Oct. 2025
Contact email: frkmgeorge@mgu.ac.in, pmgchair@mgu.ac.in
Phone: +91 9447598671
Type Setting & Printing: Sophia Print House, Kottayam

Inaugural address by
Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios at the Centenary
Celebrations of the
World's Parliament of Religions,
August 28 to September 5, 1993, Chicago.

The Vision Beckons

Not one Religion for All Humanity,
But One Humanity for All Religions

Introductory

Strange things sometimes come together by design or by accident. The first world Parliament of Religion (1893) *was held* in connection with the 400th anniversary of Columbus, discovery of America and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago to commemorate that occasion.

On the 500th anniversary of the Columbus event which so drastically altered the history of humanity and the geography of western civilization, we commemorated also the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

It will be useful to ask ourselves the question. So many inter-religious international conferences have been held in the world since then. Most of them have been forgotten except by those who were there, why does the Chicago event of 1893 remain in the memory of humanity? What happened there which needs to be remembered a hundred years later?

The Colombian Exposition, 1893 is hardly remembered when the world marveled at the Allis electricity generator on Chicago University Campus, which was started by President Cleveland in the White house in Washington, at the touch of a magic button. Technology was coming into its own. The twentieth century of "progress" was soon to begin. It was a magnificent display of the material triumphs, the mechanical marvels, and the industrial attainments of western civilization and its science/technology.

It was also the triumph of the liberal spirit, and its liberal religion. The organizers of the Columbian exposition wanted to give expression to the triumph, not only of science/technology but also of the characteristic optimism and universalism of the American spirit, expressed in the charter of the World Parliament of Religions.

"To unite all religions against all irreligion; to make the golden rule the basis of this union; to present to the world... the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the religious life; to provide for a World's Parliament of Religions, in which their common aims and common grounds of unity may be set forth, and the marvellous religious progress of the nineteenth century be reviewed."[1]

Yes, 'progress' was the ruling idea of Chicago, a hundred years ago. But at least there were some who desired more than progress in science, technology and in an industrial mechanical culture based on that science/technology. Progress was derived in religion too - "the marvellous religious progress" of the nineteenth century was to be assessed at the world Parliament and a plan for their unity based on the Golden Rule was to be formulated.

It is on that "progress" in the unity of humanity through religions that I would like to say a few words on this auspicious occasion of the inauguration of the centenary celebrations of the World Parliament of Religions.

For me this is a great privilege indeed to inaugurate the centenary celebrations of the World Parliament of Religions. The World

Parliament of Religions convened in this historic city of Chicago a century ago held aloft a torch which helped us see a vision. *That vision still beckons.* We are far from having realized it today. To renew that vision is the purpose of my remarks this evening.

I. A Vision of Human Unity with Cultural Diversity and No Domination

It is that deepest yearning of the human race to find its own unity to which the 1893 parliament responded though very partially, The human race is one - *vasudeivakutumbakom* as the Hindus say Humanity is the Family of God. Families, tribes, nations - these are but way stations to the final goal - the unity of all humanity. Absolute loyalty to tribes, nations or races is reactionary and anti-human. We must move from the parochial loyalties of village or region, town or nation, tribe or race, language or religion, to that wider loyalty - to the single humanity whose common interests are the highest priority for all human beings.

From the secular side, this unity of humanity finds strong affirmation in the New Thinking - *novoye mishlenye* - of the Soviet Union. They now confess openly that they were wrong in exaggerating the division of humanity into contending classes. They now try to emphasize the dialectical opposite side - namely that of the over-arching unity of humanity as a priority value, higher than that of class confrontation. The two great secular manifestations of western civilization - namely marxism and liberalism - are now approaching each other and seeking common ground for peaceful co-operation.

The western secular people are only about one fifth of the world - about 1 billion, which includes a substantial percentage of the Chinese as well as of the West. The remaining four-fifths belong to various religions, with varying degrees of commitment.

The unity of humanity therefore demands that the religions of the world come closer to each other, in mutual respect and under-standing. It is good that the secular governments of the liberal West

and the Marxist East are now willing to dialogue and co-operate. The other 80% of the world's people must also feel this unity of humanity.

The inspiration for this must come from the religions themselves. Just as nations have to come out of their parochialism to think and act in the spirit of global international co-operation, the religious people have also to come out of their narrow religious loyalty to affirm a global inter-religious unity and co-operation. The governments of the world can help this process, but what we need is a permanent United Religions attached to the United Nations.

UN General Secretary, U. Thant had a vision like that. In a sense the World Conference of Religions for Peace was set up in accordance with U. Thant's idea, as I understand. But it hasn't worked to produce what U. Thant envisioned. The main difficulties were first that it was in the beginning turned into an anti-communist pro-western organization, and second that it was too dominated by western Christians.

Any inter-religious organization that we build up on a global scale today will have the same problem of Western Christian domination. Unfortunately, no global inter-religious organization can be effective in bringing humanity together if Western Christians dominate. That domination seems unavoidable, since much of the money and the organizing ability usually comes from the West. Since the West has been dominating the world for the past few centuries, they do have organizing experience, but it is a dominating and controlling kind of organization that they have experience in.

We have today a very large number of international organizations - either of one religion (World Council of Churches, The Muslim World League, the Roman Catholic Church, Visva Hindu Parishad, World Buddhist Organizations etc), or of a multi-religious type (World Conference of Religions for Peace, Temple of Understanding, Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders, International Religion

Foundation, Council for the World's Religions and so on). What we need today is a "Global Concourse of Religions" in which both types of institutions, mono-religions and multi-religions, can take part on an equal footing, without any one group dominating.

Such a body would be an instrument of co-operation among the religions as well as between the religious and the secular forces; but it should never become an authority dominating the various world religions. It should preferably be called a Concourse rather than a Conference, for it should be a "running together" or "flowing together" of various cultures in dialogue and co-operation with each other.

II. Commitment to Justice, Peace and a Life-supporting Environment

Such a Global Concourse of Religions should be committed to the goal of the unity of global humanity (including the secular people) in cultural diversity and not dominated by one group. But that unity of humanity is possible only in societies of peace with justice, in societies co-operating globally to promote a life-supporting environment.

We know today that all the three issues - Peace, Justice, and Environment, are global in scope and inter-connected.

In the area of peace, the GCR will focus on the questions of international morality and the concept of Comprehensive Global Common Security. At present there is very little moral law binding the nations together to which the global community is committed. Just as individuals and groups now living within a single nation have some moral commitments to each other, people living within different nations will have to enter into a mutual commitment to live together in cooperation and with respect for each other.

It is high time that we realized that our great national patriotism is divisive and directed against the interests of others. The mother from whose womb I was born is precious to me. I give her special loyalty

and attention. But that does not mean that I can be indifferent or inimical to the general interests of other people in my country as well as elsewhere on the globe.

Nationalism-patriotism is an acquired habit. Its halo only covers up the selfish, exclusive aspect of it. We must make a resolute move from loyalty to the nation and to its interests, to a greater loyalty to global humanity and its interests. This applies to India as to America and to all nations.

Comprehensive Global Common Security means security for all people on the globe without weapons of war. Comprehensive Security means more than security from external military aggression. It means security also from other killers like poverty and want, from starvation and malnutrition, from oppression and exploitation, from disease and ignorance: it means security of each person's human dignity; it ensures for each person the right to work and to live a life worthy of human dignity. Comprehensive Global Common Security thus, means justice, peace and a life-promoting environment and much more. It means elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, of weapons of chemical and biological warfare, and eventually of all weapons of any warfare.

Unless the religions of the world take a strong lead in breaking through the confining parochial barriers of consciousness and loyalty, a global humanity will not take shape. Our Global Concourse of Religions would thus have a permanent commitment to Comprehensive Global Common Security and a programme to achieve it as a high priority.

III. Global Humanity between Two Poles

Humanity exists between two poles - its transcendent origin and ground on the one hand, and on the other, the world with which it is integrally related. The latter point is easier to grasp, though often forgotten. If the sun did not shine, my life on earth could not exist. And that sun is a point in a multi-billion-star galaxy of galaxies in

which all things are inter-connected. The earth, with its oceans and lakes, rivers and wind-systems, mountains and clouds, birds, and trees, animals and other humans is an integral part of my life. My life could not exist if that universe did not sustain it and support it. And only one dimension of that vast and complex universe is open to our senses.

I become a human being only by interacting with the earth - consciously through work and unconsciously through my breathing and blood circulation, through my food-and-drink intake and elimination systems, and through the thousand other unconscious processes going on in my body and mind as well as around me.

Now; something has happened to the way we interact with our earth. We came upon a developed science/technology and the big-machine industrial system only about a century ago. In fact, the World Parliament of Religions was convened in connection with The Columbiana exposition of America's industrial-technological achievements. Electricity came only in 1878, the telephone in 1876, the typewriter in 1873 and railways and telegraph in 1866. There was an air of excitement about the new technology which revolutionized our interaction with the earth and our environment. Justified excitement indeed, but what a mess our industrial system has got us into!

Our problem today is that the earth is reacting rather negatively to our high-handed industrial-technological handling of it. In fact, all the three problems we confront today, injustice, war and environmental deterioration are directly related to our science/technology based industrial system and the neo-colonial system which has grown up with the industrial system. We have been too unrestrained and immature in our greedy handling of the earth and in our relationship with human beings on it. The western version of the Christian religion bears a large share of the responsibility of bringing humanity to such a predicament. Hubris and greed, desire for

domination and property, have ruined the human race and its environment, exposing us and all life to the risk of extinction.

The religions of the world have now to work together to redeem humanity from its present precarious predicament. We need to liberate humanity from the secular trap in which it has been unconsciously caught. Modern science and the technology based on it, as well as the political economy that undergirds it have developed in a secular framework where humanity as dominating subject and the world as passive object have been the only two factors that mattered. God or the transcendent has become an unnecessary hypothesis in our science/technology, in our universities and schools, in our political institutions.

This is the secular trap from which humanity needs emancipation. It is not simply a question of bringing in God through the window. Philosophical theisms are all too philosophically weak to stand. It is not simply at the intellectual or conceptual level that the transcendent has to be reaffirmed.

The various religions of the world have honored and cherished the experience of the transcendent, throughout human history, despite the scathing secular attack. We have done so through our doctrines and practices, through our prayers and rituals, through our mystic quests and experiences, through our compassion for humanity and our devotion to the source and ground of all being.

Of course in religion too we have made a mess of things, as in our science/technology. We have made religion an instrument of our greed for political power and for economic advantage. We have allowed the most ungodly and inhuman practices in the name of religion. We have fought wars and destroyed each other in the name of God and religion. We have used our Crusades and our Jehads to plunder and pilfer the wealth of other peoples.

Religion too needs emancipation. We as humanity now stand alienated, by our own evil practices, from both poles of our exist-

ence, from the transcendent source and ground of our being and from the earth and society in which we have been placed.

The two redemptions, the overcoming of the two alienations, i.e., in the two realms of transcendent religion and humanitarian dealing with our earth in science/technology and political economy, the double salvation for which humanity yearns, must become the top concern of the Global Concourse of Religions. The two emancipations can come only as a single package. It is only as our religions cease being negative and exclusive that our science-technology and our political economy also become more human.

The secular trap in which we have languished for more than a century since the European Enlightenment, must be recognized as such a trap. The world is not secular. It did not come into being by itself, nor is it able to exist without contingent dependence on its source and ground.

Our science-technology and our political economies have no doubt made great gains operating in a secular framework where the transcendent is totally ignored and even held as taboo for discussion.

We are today at a stage where we can move out of that secular bind to a new humanitarian, compassionate, non-exclusive Global Concourse of Religions. That way we will find our way to a new science/technology and a new political economy which are more human and more life-affirming.

To me this is the vision that beckons. We shall not abandon critical reason, but we shall go beyond it to find a more compassionate, more human, more transcendent - acknowledging kind of reason. We do not abandon our national loyalties, but we shall go beyond them to keep global human interests above our national interests. We do not abandon our own particular religious loyalties: but we shall deepen them in dialogue and concourse with other religions in order to find those deeper roots in each religion which affirm the unity of global humanity and which affirm the transcendent love in which we all live and move and have our being.

As I humbly inaugurate this opening of the Centenary celebrations, let us also move to common prayer, that all humanity may be brought into a single concourse and all of us acknowledge together in our various idioms the Transcendent Love, Wisdom and Power that really unites us.

(Footnotes)

1. The World's Religious Congress, Programme of the World's Religious Congress of 1893 Preliminary edition. Chicago. Rand McNally and Co n.d. p. 19.